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U.S. Aides Hunt Sources of Leaks

Sometimes it seems as if Richard Nixon never left town. A few weeks ago, President Carter fumed at his Cabinet about the "leaks of Cabinet minutes." He made it perfectly clear that he didn't like to read his confidential conversations in our column. He sounded just like Nixon.

Now the State Department is in an uproar over our publication of a confidential cable from Ambassador Ronald Spiers in Turkey. No one has yet formed a plumbers squad to shut off the leaks. But Carter has ordered his Cabinet secretary, Jack Watson, to find who's leaking and to submit "a memorandum on this subject." And State has its security apparatus on the lookout for our source. It seems like old times.

We upset the pontificators at Foggy Bottom by reporting Spiers' assessment of a recent speech by Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit. It was a chauvinistic speech, and Spiers called it "mindless nationalism" in a cable to the State Department.

We cited the cable in a report on the popular international sport of flogging the United States. Indeed, the cable expressed concern that Ecevit "may so enjoy the popular acclaim that comes from talking back to Americans that he will continue it."

We felt the American people were entitled to know that our allies, Greeks and Turks alike, enjoyed assailing America. But our story caused a furor; we have reliably learned that Ecevit, his sensibilities offended, raised an unholy howl.

The State Department ordered Spiers to fly to Brussels to soothe the

ruffled Ecevit, who was in Belgium at the time. According to confidential sources, the ambassador told Ecevit that we had taken the embarrassing quote out of context.

In Washington, Turkish Ambassador Melih Esenbel filed a formal protest with the State Department. He, too, was assured that we had misrepresented the meaning of Spiers' comments.

It has been our practice, when we are accused of taking quotes out of context, to supply the context. The controversial cable, dated March 24, 1978, began:

"Prime Minister Ecevit's foreign policy speech to the Senate March 23 covered the same material as the speech before the National Assembly the previous day, but the tone was harsher and more nationalistic and perhaps for that reason, the Turkish press gave the Senate speech better coverage."

"In his speech, Ecevit clearly identified the United States as the source of outside pressures that the Turkish nation would unite to withstand. He also repeated his claim that Turkey has given more to NATO than it has received, and he again spoke of the need for Turkey to develop a new security concept."

The cable then reviewed the prime minister's speech, singling out several direct quotes. Finally, the cable concluded:

"It is not clear why Ecevit decided to resort to emotional nationalism to defend his foreign policy performance. At this point he appears to have sufficiently strong public and political sup-

port that he does not need the assistance of mindless nationalism.

"One possible reason is his continuing deep unhappiness with what he considered to be an attempt by the U.S. to pressure him and thus threaten the success of Montreux [a Greek-Turkish summit meeting held in March].

"Another possibility is that he is preparing the public for a radical departure from traditional Turkish foreign policy. We tend to believe it is the former, but the danger is that he may so enjoy the popular acclaim that comes from talking back to Americans that he will continue it even after the current misunderstanding has passed."

The State Department, in the Nixon tradition, is now trying to discover the source of our news. A leading suspect, according to insiders, is Greek journalist Elias Demetracopoulos who left his homeland in 1967 to fight the dictatorship in Athens. He used Washington as a base for bombarding the junta with criticism. He so irritated the pro-junta Nixon administration that it actually considered deporting him to Greece where he would have faced certain torture and possible death.

We notified Demetracopoulos that the State Department suspected him of leaking the classified cables to us. He sounded incredulous. "Rubbish!" he snorted. Then he called back with a formal response. "These charges by anonymous sources," he told our associate Joe Spear, "have a familiar Turkish ring. They are untrue, unworthy and unconscionable."